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C O N F I D E N T I A L DJIBOUTI 000578

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF AND AF/E

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [SA](#) [DJ](#)

SUBJECT: MINISTER OF AWQAF AND ISLAMIC AFFAIRS: RELIGIOUS
EXTREMISM NOT IN DJIBOUTI'S NATURE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR MARGUERITA D. RAGSDALE.
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

1. (C) Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Mogueh Samatar Dirir described to Ambassador, during her courtesy call April 7, the role of his ministry as one of having authority over all Islamic issues affecting Djibouti. These issues include the manner in which mosques and religious schools should operate. Its central difficulty, as a relatively new ministry (2 years of age), he said, is the lack of necessary resources to implement all the programs in its pipeline.

2. (C) Ambassador inquired about the role of the High Islamic Council that the Ministerial Council recently established, under the chairmanship of the Minister of Islamic Affairs. The Minister affirmed the plan for a High Islamic Council and said its mandate is to give advice to the Government on all issues and concerns of a religious nature. It will also take charge of and coordinate the activities of all Islamic non-governmental organizations (NGOs) present in Djibouti, although he did not clarify how this would be done or how the additional portfolio overlaps with current ministerial operations. The Minister added, however, that the council would need adequate material assistance to fully function in the manner the Ministerial Council envisioned.

3. (C) Dirir expressed regret that funding his ministry had previously received from Saudi Arabia had now diminished. He cited as a cause the general political and economic constraints on Saudi assistance worldwide that have followed the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States. He cautioned, however, that such support in the past was never used for extremist purposes. Extremism in Djibouti is not likely, he continued, because of the calm and non-extremist nature of Djiboutians and because their traditions dictate that they think and behave otherwise. Dirir added that Djiboutians have never been easily influenced by foreign ideology. He said the majority of the country's Muslims followed the moderate Shafi'i school of religious thought, although the Kadiri branch of Sufism is also present.

4. (C) Asked about government oversight of mosque operations, Dirir said that in Djibouti, each imam of a mosque is currently free to preach on any topic he wishes. However, the Ministry of Awqaf and Religious Affairs is planning to begin monitoring and controlling these sermons. He said this is important to ensure that imams do not tout ideas that might be interpreted, either by others or by Djiboutians, as extremist.

5. (C) On women's issues, the Minister said his ministry does not yet have, but is planning to have, a family education department that would be dedicated exclusively to issues of women in Islam. For now, the Awqaf ministry fully supports the agenda of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, co-located in the same building with the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs.

6. (C) BIO-DATA: Somali by origin, Dirir is believed to have been born in Ethiopia. He speaks Arabic and Somali, but only limited French. He was appointed Djibouti's first "Qadi" (religious judge) after its independence from France in 1977 and served in that position until his appointment as Minister in 2002.
RAGSDALE